

House Armed Services Committee

DEMOCRATS

*For immediate release
March 10, 2005*

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Future of Naval Fleet Questioned

Washington D.C.—Today the Projection Forces Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee questioned officials from the U.S. Navy on their proposed fiscal year 2006 shipbuilding budget request. Subcommittee Ranking Member, Gene Taylor (MS) made the following statement:

“I’d like to thank the Chairman for recognizing me and thank you also for scheduling this hearing. Today’s hearing is on the Navy’s Future Fleet. I know of no more important topic for this subcommittee. This year will be pivotal in determining whether we will reverse course and start to build a strong Navy fleet, or whether we allow our Navy to shrink beyond all recognition.

“I’d like to welcome Secretary Young, Admiral Sestak, Admiral Crenshaw, General Magnus, General Mattis welcome back, and Mr. O’Rourke.

“In 2001, Admiral Clark stated that a Navy shipbuilding budget of \$12 billion was essential to maintaining the naval fleet required by our National Military Strategy. He also stated then, just 4 years ago, that 375 ships were required to execute this strategy. At that time, the Navy had 314 ships. Today, the Navy has only 288 ships, the Navy’s 2006 budget proposal contains only \$8.7 billion for shipbuilding, and includes only 4 new construction ships. Something is very wrong with this picture. I hope in today’s hearing that we will learn why there is such a severe disconnect between the rhetoric about shipbuilding, and the reality of this budget.

“I am open to the idea of alternative funding methods for ships. Frankly I’m open to anything which can get us out of this mess we’re in on shipbuilding. But I’m also disappointed that the budget request for shipbuilding has declined for two straight years at a time when the Navy is retiring ships at an accelerated pace. The case for alternative financing methods is weakened if Congress believes that the Navy will simply use any flexibilities given to further reduce the shipbuilding budget.

“I’m also troubled by the devastation this budget wreaks on the shipbuilding industrial base. We have 6 major construction shipyards and only 4 new ships. It doesn’t

take a math genius to see that that doesn't work. This budget will drive the Navy to make decisions about the industrial base that I believe may do long term damage to our national security.

"I don't agree with the Department of the Navy's decision to go to a sole source for destroyers. Secretary Young, you have stated that the Navy's current plan to procure one DD(X) destroyer per year starting in 2007 can only support one destroyer shipyard. By taking this year's historically low and abnormal budget request for destroyers as a starting point, I think you've put the cart before the horse.

"We should not be making a decision as important as the structure of our industrial base for the next 30 plus years based on a future budget projection that is clouded by the fog of war, and which I believe does not set the right priorities. And I say this even though the shipyard in my district stands a strong chance of becoming the sole source for destroyers.

"I still don't think the policy is right. Since 2000, destroyers have accounted for just under half of all the Navy ships built by this country (15 out of 32). If we are ever going to halt the slide in the number of Navy ships, it can only happen with the robust production of DD(X) destroyers and other surface combatant ships.

"I expect to hear from the witnesses today answers to tough questions: on why the budget for shipbuilding has become the bill payer for everything else in the Navy, why the budget presentation before us cuts 18 ships out of the Navy's budget over the FYDP, and how we are going to fix this problem."

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